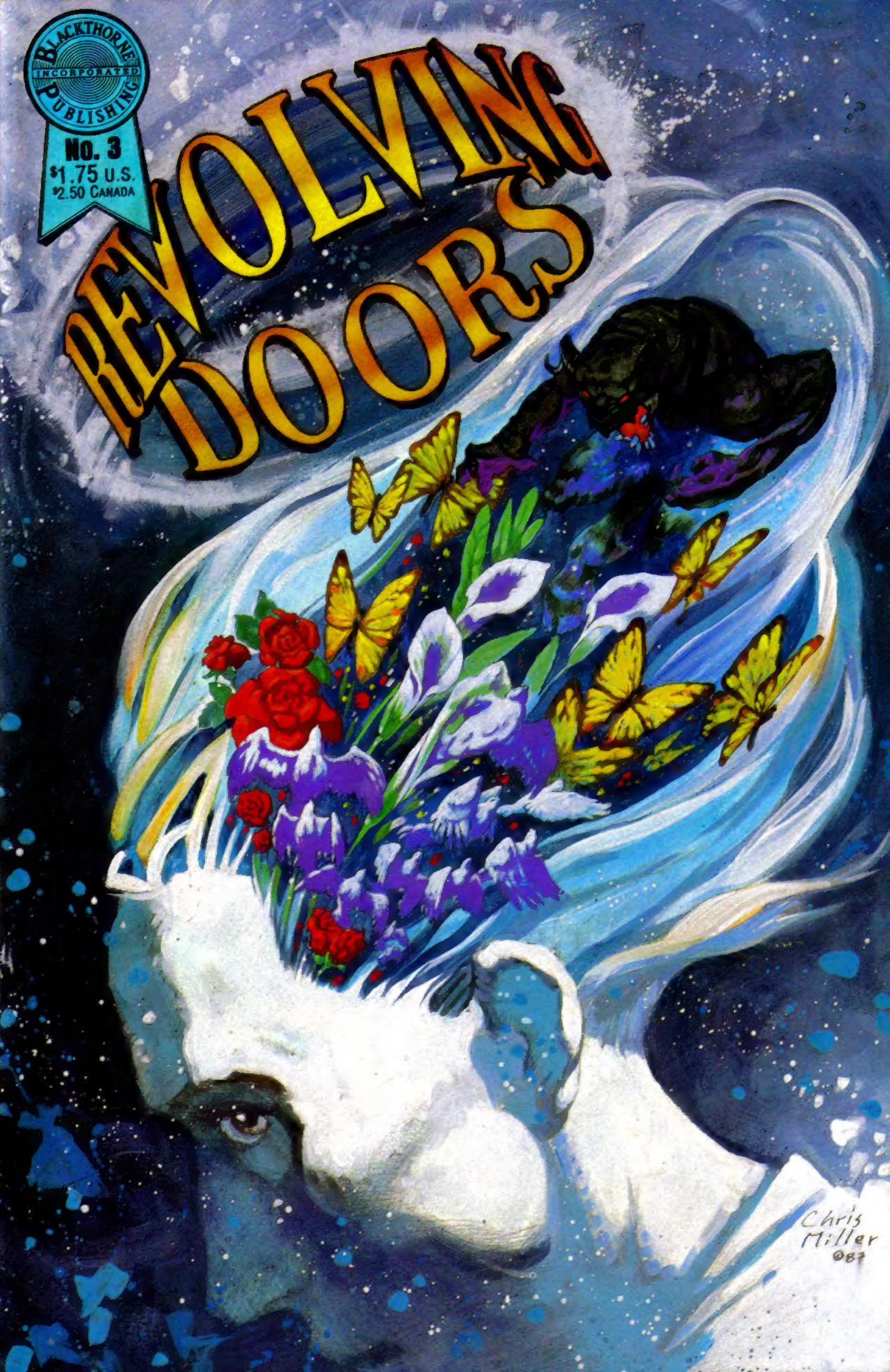
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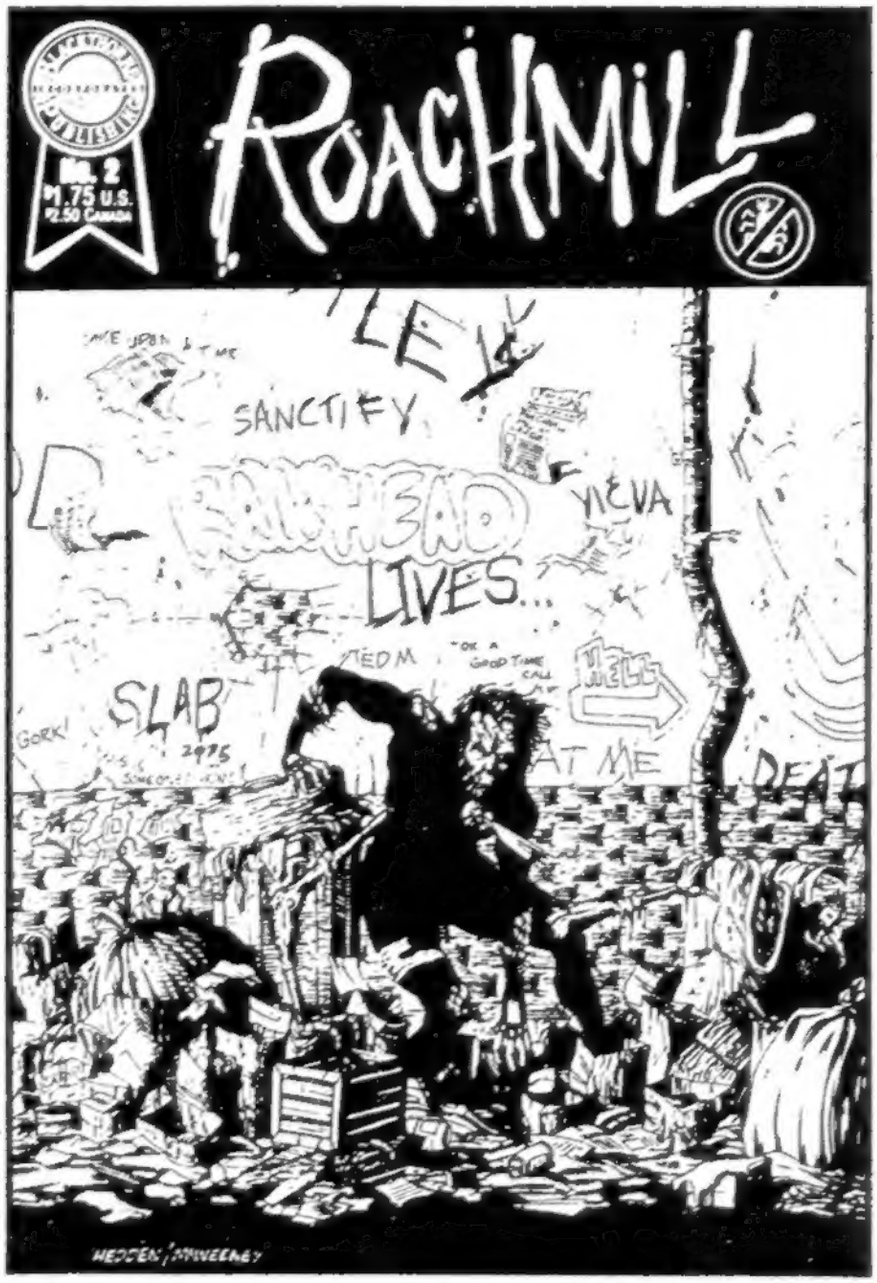

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IMAGES OF THE BEAST HE HAD CONJURED SCREAMED IN STEPPEN'S MIND AND DROVE HIM SCRAMBLING THROUGH THE FOREST.
REVOLVING DOORS
ISSUE #3
Created, written and illustrated by
CHRIS MILLER

...HE ENCOUNTERED STARTLED CREATURES THAT HE WOULD NORMALLY HAVE CHOSEN TO AVOID,

GANGWAY!!

AND HE PASSED
DEEPER AND DEEPER
INTO AN EVER-DARKENING FOREST.

THIS TIME HE HAD NO FEAR OF BECOMING LOST, IN FACT, HE WAS COUNTING ON IT.

SOON HIS RUNNING BECAME A WALK... THE WALK BECAME A STUMBLE...

AND THE FOREST GAVE RESPITE IN THE FORM OF A SMALL CLEARING...

...AND SPARKLING WATERS.
STEPPEN LAID DOWN TO REST...
...AND TOOK A ONE-EYED SURVEY OF HIS SURROUNDINGS WHILE INDULGING IN SOME OLD-FASHIONED WORRY.

IT WAS A LUSH AND SECRET PLACE.

AS STEPPEN'S GAZE SLOWLY CLIMBED THE VINES THAT SURROUNDED HIM...
...HIS MIND BEGAN TO DISCERN A SHAPE...
...MAN-MADE IN APPEARANCE, YET NOT.

WILD!

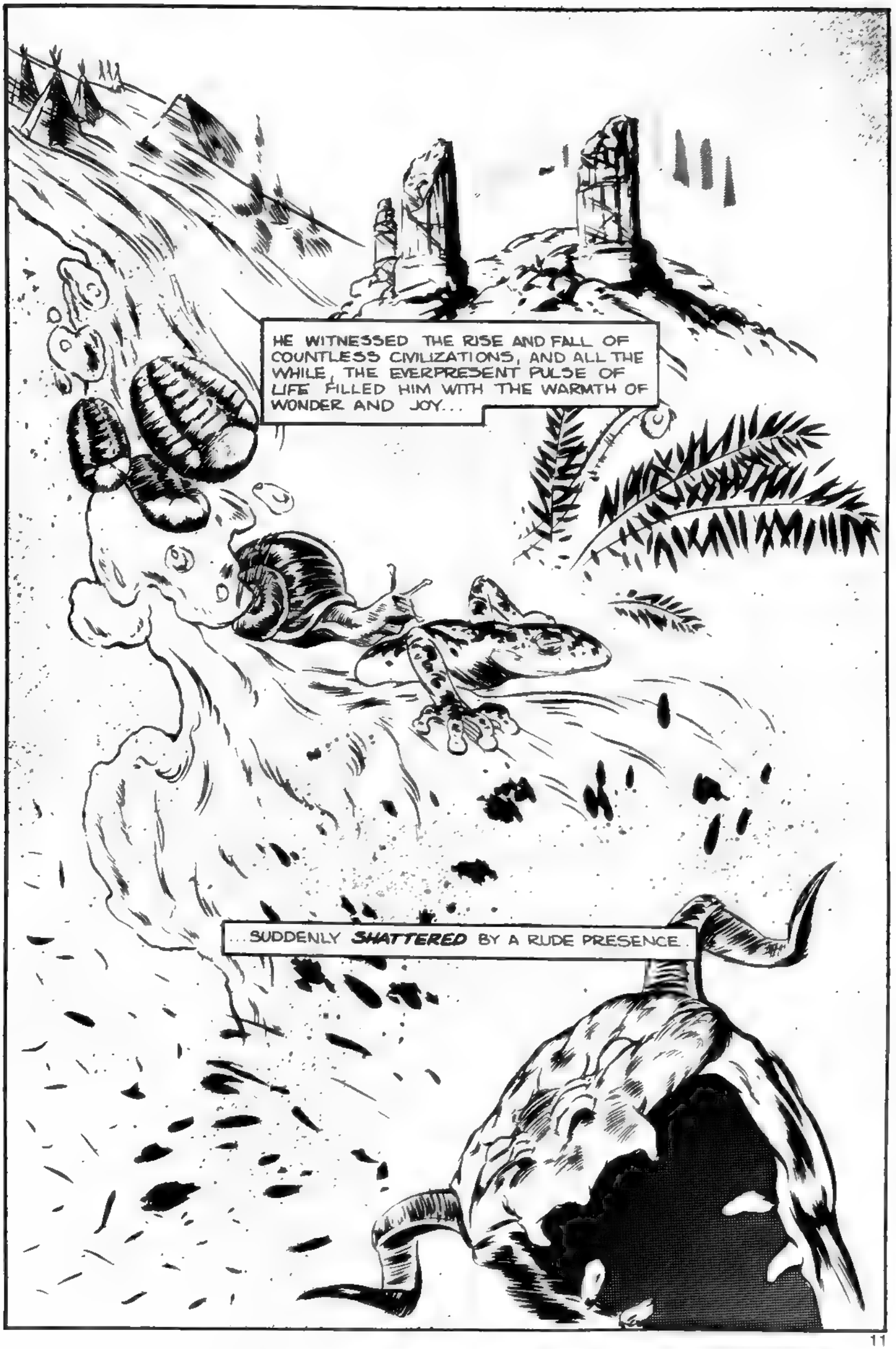
THIS WAS SOMETHING THAT REQUIRED CLOSER INSPECTION.

AS STEPPEN SETTLED INTO THE NATURAL SEAT A FEELING OVERCAME HIM, A FEELING MORE COMFORTABLE AND RELAXED THAN HE COULD REMEMBER...

...AND SOON FELL INTO A DREAM-LADEN SLEEP
THAT RENDERED HIM OBLIVIOUS TO THE GENTLE STIRRINGS,
AS CURIOUS TENDRILS REACHED OUT FOR HIM, DRAWN TO A LIFE-FORCE NOT THEIR OWN.

IN HIS DREAM STEPPEN STRUGGLED WITH A SWARM OF DARK IMAGES, THREATENING, GREY TOWERS; STRANGE, UNFREINDLY FACES. AS THE TENDRILS TOUCHED HIM, HIS DREAMS WERE INVADED BY MEMORIES NOT HIS OWN... ...AND HE WAS SWEPT UP IN THE OTHER AWARENESS...
DONT
WA!
TOWERS GAVE WAY TO FORESTS, CITY STREETS WERE RIVERS

HE WAS AWARE OF BURROWING THROUGH EARTH AND LOAM AND THE ECSTACY OF NEW GREEN *LIFE* SHOOTING TO THE SUN FOR THE FIRST TIME... HE FELT URGES HE HAD NEVER KNOWN, FIGHTING TOWARDS SOMETHING FELT FROM THE DARKNESS... AND SOARING HIGH WITH FAR VISION.

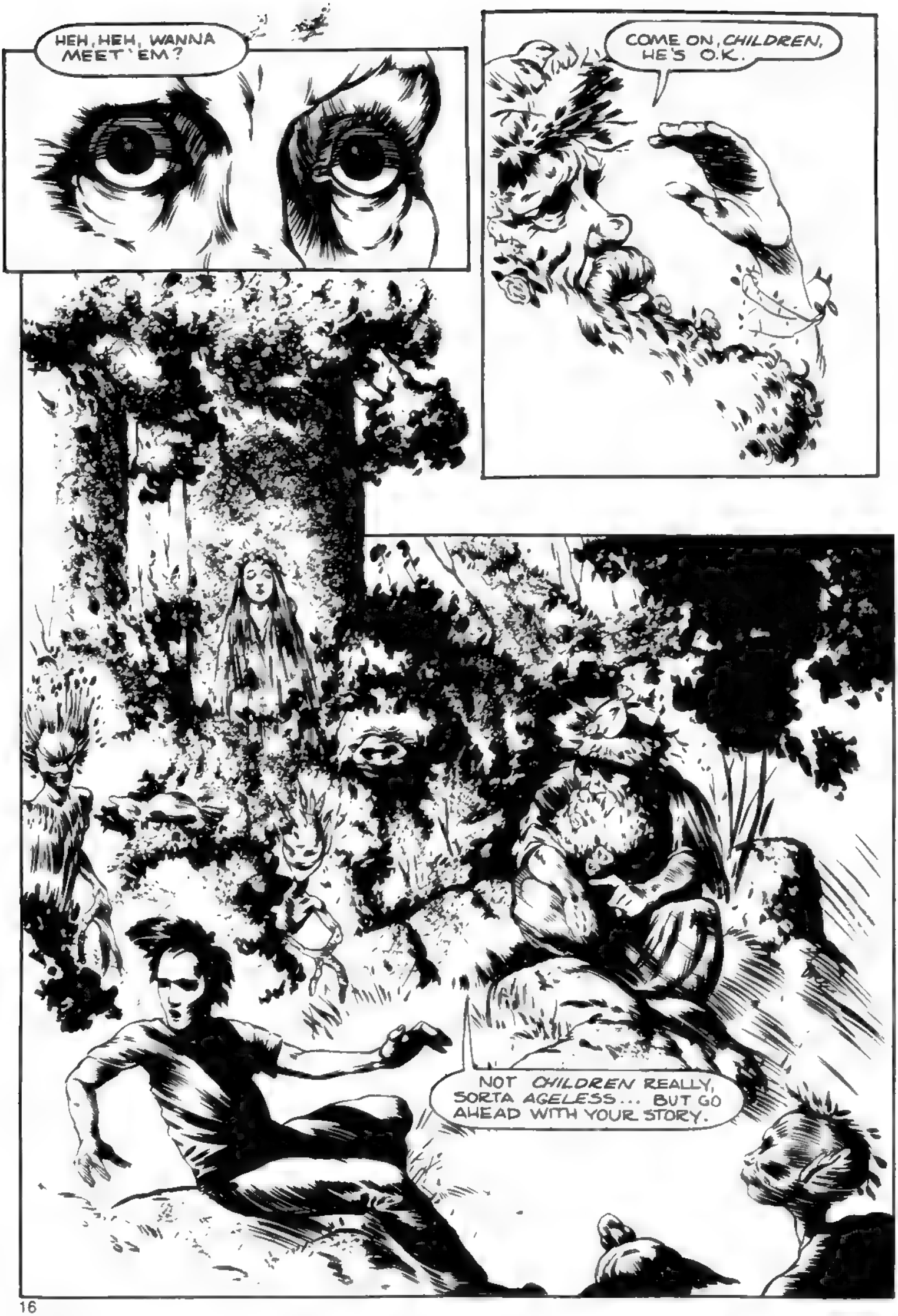

HE WITNESSED THE RISE AND FALL OF COUNTLESS CIVILIZATIONS, AND ALL THE WHILE, THE EVERPRESENT PULSE OF LIFE FILLED HIM WITH THE WARMTH OF WONDER AND JOY...
...SUDDENLY SHATTERED BY A RUDE PRESENCE.

THAT BORE VISCIOUSLY DOWN ON HIM CHASING HIM SCREAMING BACK TO CONCIOUSNESS.
YAA!

WHAT TH... U-U-H
HEY!
TAKE IT EASY, BOY!
STEPPEN ROSE WITH A JERK AND TUMBLED TO THE GROUND BELOW
HEH, HEH, NICE TRICK!

HOLD ON, BOY. GOT DEMONS ON YER HEEL? HA-HA.
YOU KNOW?
HOW NOT? YOU MAKE SOME BIG NOISE BACK THERE.
WHO ARE YOU?
H-M-M... DON'T REALLY HAVE A CERTAIN NAME, 'CEPT FOR A FEW GIVEN TO ME IN ME YOUTH. HEH, HEH... NO MATTER COME 'ERE, KID.

SIT!
THE OLD MAN SAT AND SEEMED TO BLEND INTO THE LANDSCAPE.
SO WHAT'S THE STORY, KID?... BRIEFLY, PLEASE.
NOT KNOWING WHERE TO BEGIN... STEPPEN BLURTED...
I JUST GOTTA GET OUTTA HERE! I DON'T BELONG HERE!
ELICITING LAUGHTER FROM THE SURROUNDING FOREST.
HA-HA-HA
WHO'S THAT?


HEH, HEH, WANNA MEET 'EM?
COME ON, CHILDREN, HE'S O.K.
NOT CHILDREN REALLY, SORTA AGELESS... BUT GO AHEAD WITH YOUR STORY.

AS STEPPEN RELATED THE TERMS OF HIS DILEMA, HIS HOSTS BEGAN TO SNICKER... THE MORE URGENTLY HE STRESSED THE UTTER DIRENESS OF HIS SITUATION THE HARDER THEY LAUGHED... 'TILL ALL WERE ROLLING ON THE GROUND IN MIRTH.
MEANWHILE...
THE SMELL OF FEAR AND HATRED DREW THE HUNGRY BEAST TO THE CITY AS IF TO A BANQUET!
C. M. 87

WITH NO REGARD FOR SOCIAL GRACE...
...THE BEAST LET ITSELF IN...
..AND GORGED!!

RECOVERING FROM HIS MIRTH THE NAMELESS OLD MAN SIGHED AND BEGAN IN EARNEST TO UNRAVEL AN ANCIENT TALE THAT STEPPEN WAS SOMEHOW INESCAPABLY EMERSED IN. HE TOLD OF AGE-OLD RIVALS, OF THEIR OPPOSING PHILOSOPHIES AND LIKE PURSUITS OF KNOWLEDGE, WEALTH AND POWER. HE REVEALED A WORLD LOCKED IN AN ENDLESS STRUGGLE, BALANCED BETWEEN TWO EQUAL FORCES. WITHIN BOTH OF THE CULTURES ONE SINGLE PROPHECY HAD SURVIVED THE AGES TO BECOME THE FOCUS OF THEIR THOUGHTS, DREAMS, AND EFFORTS. BOTH SIDES BELIEVED THAT AN OUTSIDER WOULD COME POSESSED OF THE POWER TO ALTER THE ANCIENT BALANCE... EACH ONE ALSO BELIEVED THE BALANCE WOULD BE TIPPED IN HIS FAVOR. IN UNBROKEN LINES THAT STRETCH BACK BEYOND MEMORY, GENERATION AFTER GENERATION OF RIVAL RULERS PREPARED FOR THIS COMING.
THE PROPHECY HAS CHOSEN YOU, STEPPEN, WHETHER YOU WANT IT OR NOT THIS IS YOUR DESTINY. YOU HAVE STARTED SOMETHING ONLY YOU CAN FINISH...AND IF YOU ARE TO MAKE YOUR OWN CHOICES, YOU MUST CHOOSE HOW YOU WILL MEET YOUR FATE, NOT WHAT FATE YOU WILL MEET.
SEEK OUT THE BEAST BEFORE HE SEEKS YOU.
NO WAY! HAVE YOU SEEN THAT THING?

THE CALMING TOUCH OF HIS HOSTS REMINDED STEPPEN OF WONDERS HE HAD JUST EXPERIENCED.

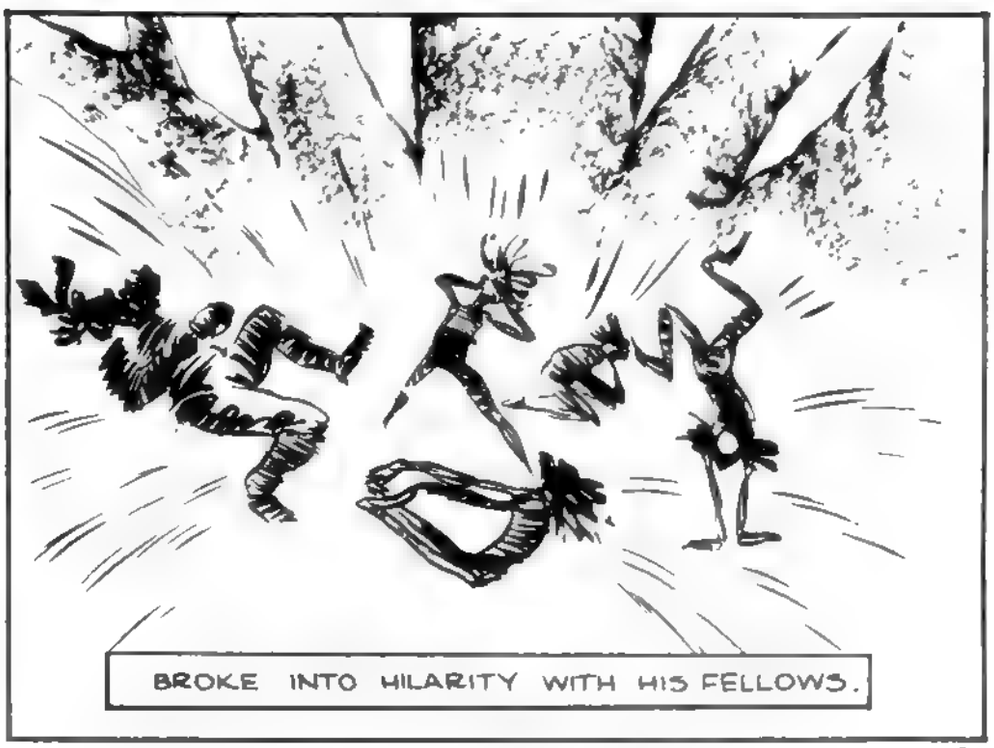
HE WAS ALMOST CONVINCED.

SO... WHERE DO I START?

...AND REMEMBER THAT THINGS'R DIFFERENT WHEN YOU ARE RUNNING FROM 'EM...
TRY TO REMEMBER WHERE IT CAME FROM...

WITH THAT, HE URGED STEPPEN OFF IN THE DIRECTION OF THE CITY.

AND WHEN HE WAS GONE...


BROKE INTO HILARITY WITH HIS FELLOWS.

MEANWHILE, STEPPEN WAS EXECUTING *PLAN 'B'*...
THIS IS WHERE I BUG-OUT!!
TAKING THE *WRONG* FORK IN THE ROAD...
...LEADING HIM...

...WITHOUT WARNING...
...INTO WAITING HANDS.
BIG DAY, BOYS... IT'S HIM AGAIN. DON'T SEEM LIKE HE'S SO POWERFUL DOES IT? HA,HA!
SOME FOLKS'LL BE GLAD TO SEE YOU, KID.
NO! WAIT...

YOU CAN'T GO THERE!
LISTEN!

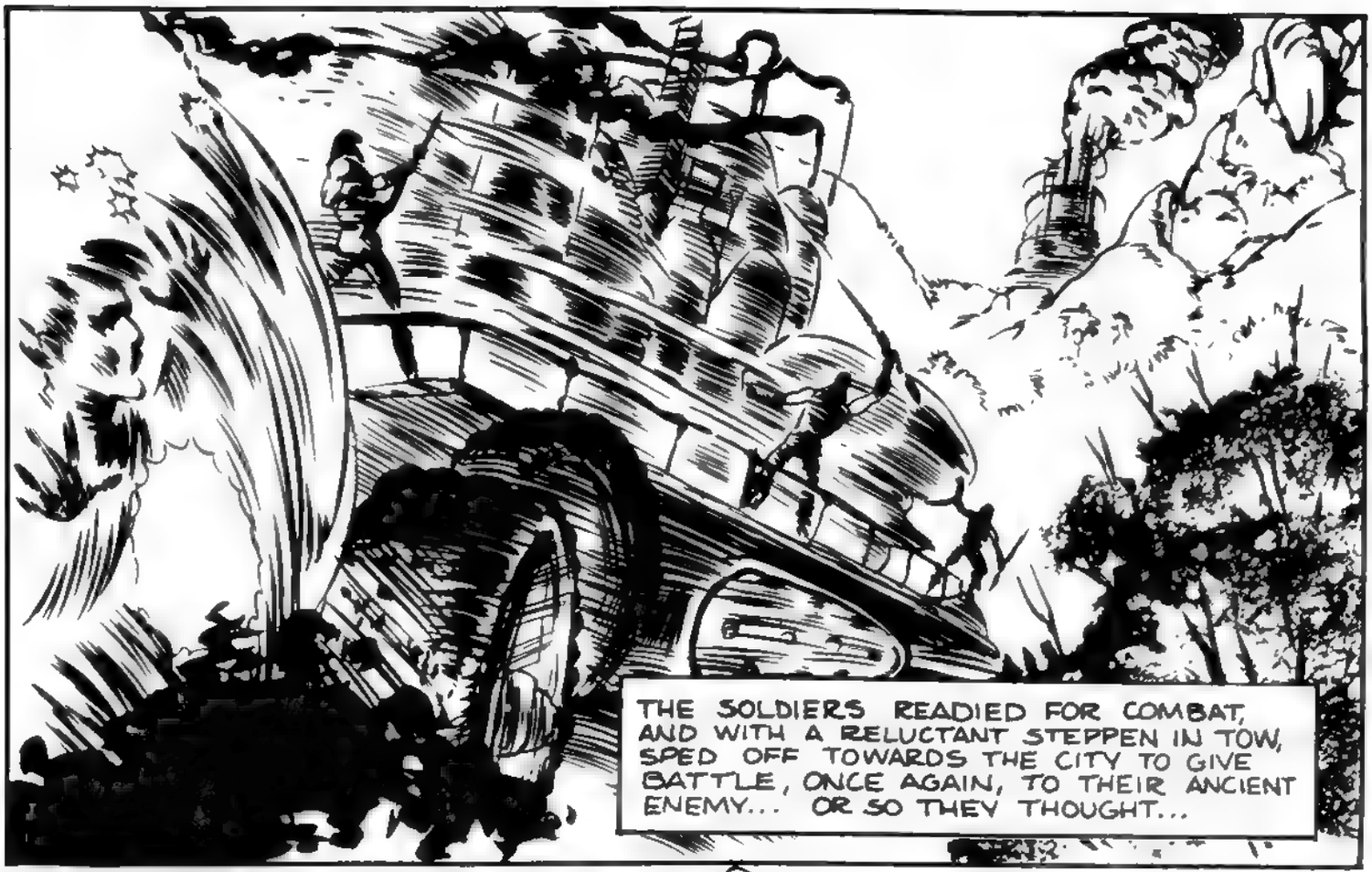
MEANWHILE, THE BEAST WAS HAVING HIS WAY WITH THE CITY.
AND MOVED EVER-INWARD TOWARDS THE HEART OF THINGS...

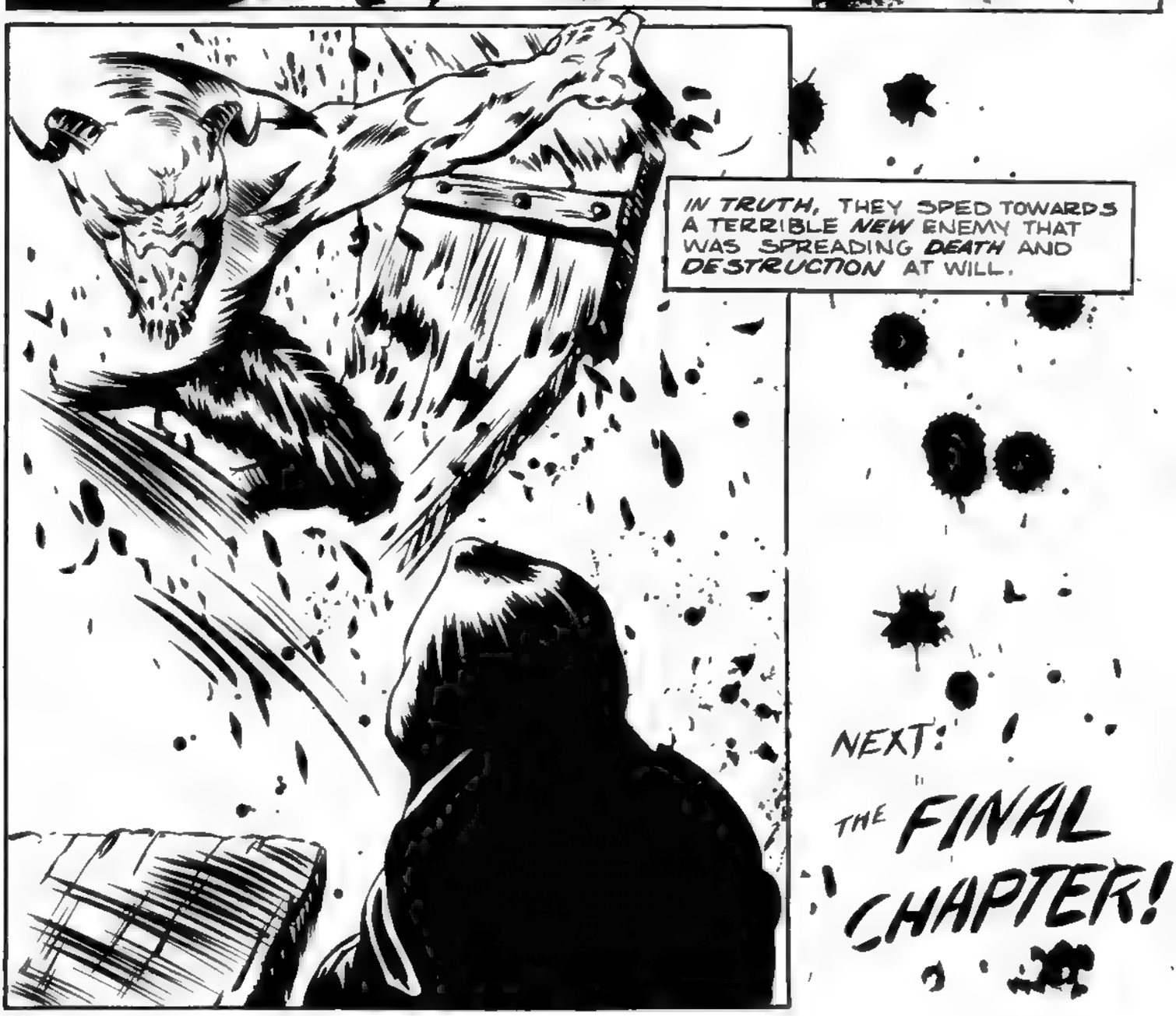
BACK IN THE SEAT, EVENTS WERE KNOWN...

...AND PLEASING...

...TO TWO.

STEPPEN AND HIS CAPTORS APPROACHED THE CITY AND MISTOOK THE SMOKE AND FIRE OF THE BEAST'S RAMPAGE FOR A SNEAK ATTACK BY RIVAL FORCES.
ATTACK!!
WEAPONS! NOW!


THE SOLDIERS READIED FOR COMBAT, AND WITH A RELUCTANT STEPPEN IN TOW, SPED OFF TOWARDS THE CITY TO GIVE BATTLE, ONCE AGAIN, TO THEIR ANCIENT ENEMY... OR SO THEY THOUGHT...


IN TRUTH, THEY SPED TOWARDS A TERRIBLE NEW ENEMY THAT WAS SPREADING DEATH AND DESTRUCTION AT WILL.
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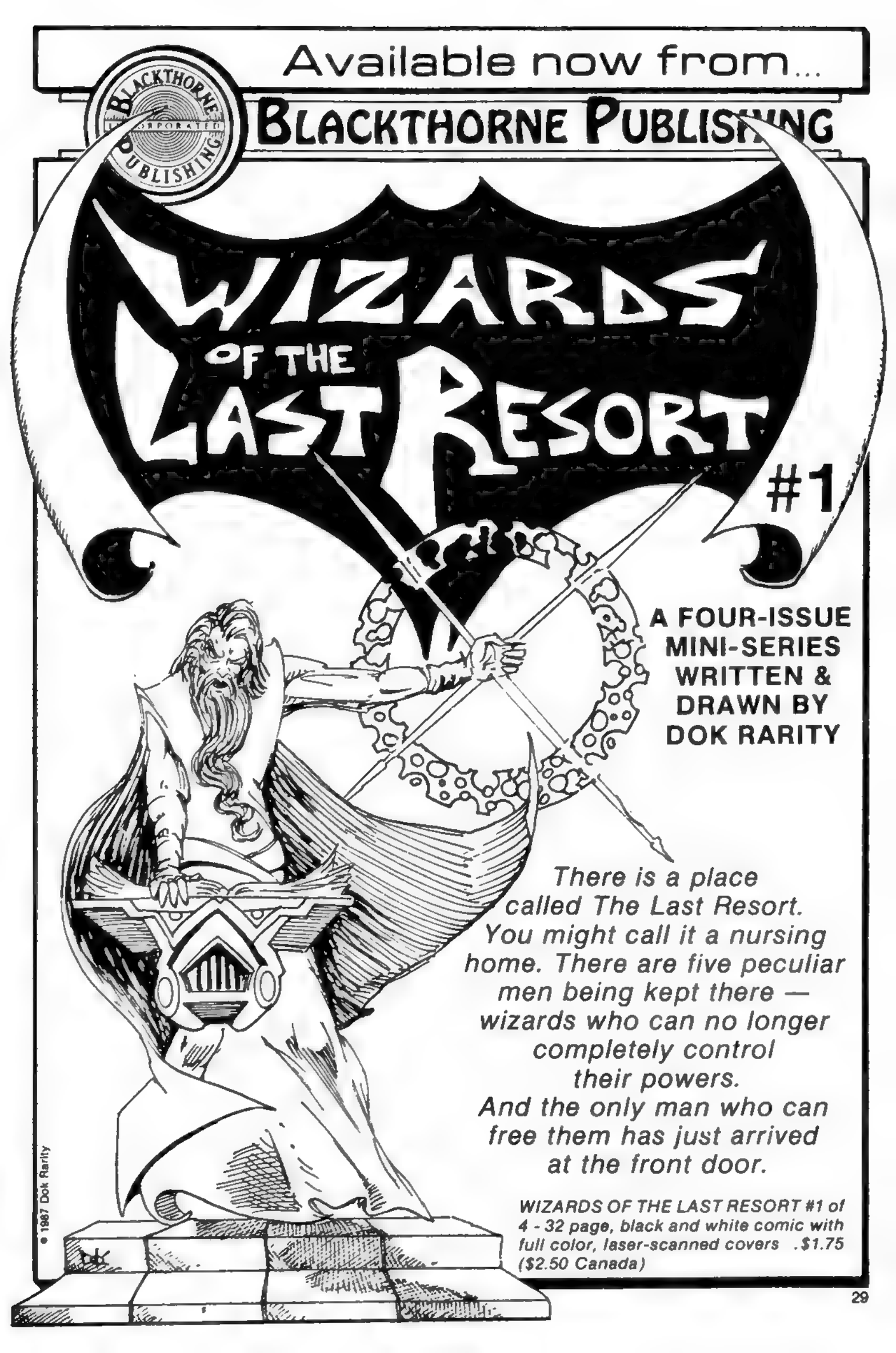

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HE IS SETH MERLINSON, AND HE IS HERE ON A MISSION OF VENGEANCE.

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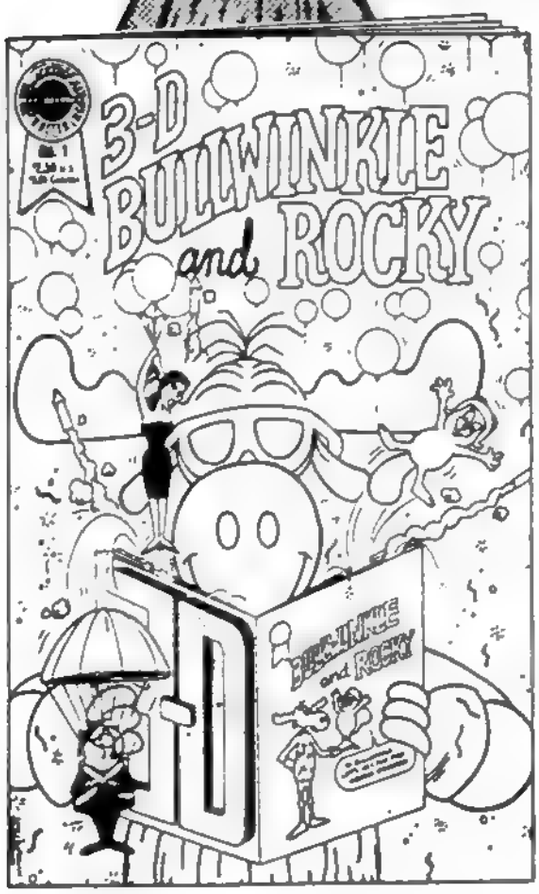
EENIE MEENIE CHILI BEANIE THE SPIRITS ARE ABOUT TO SPEAK!



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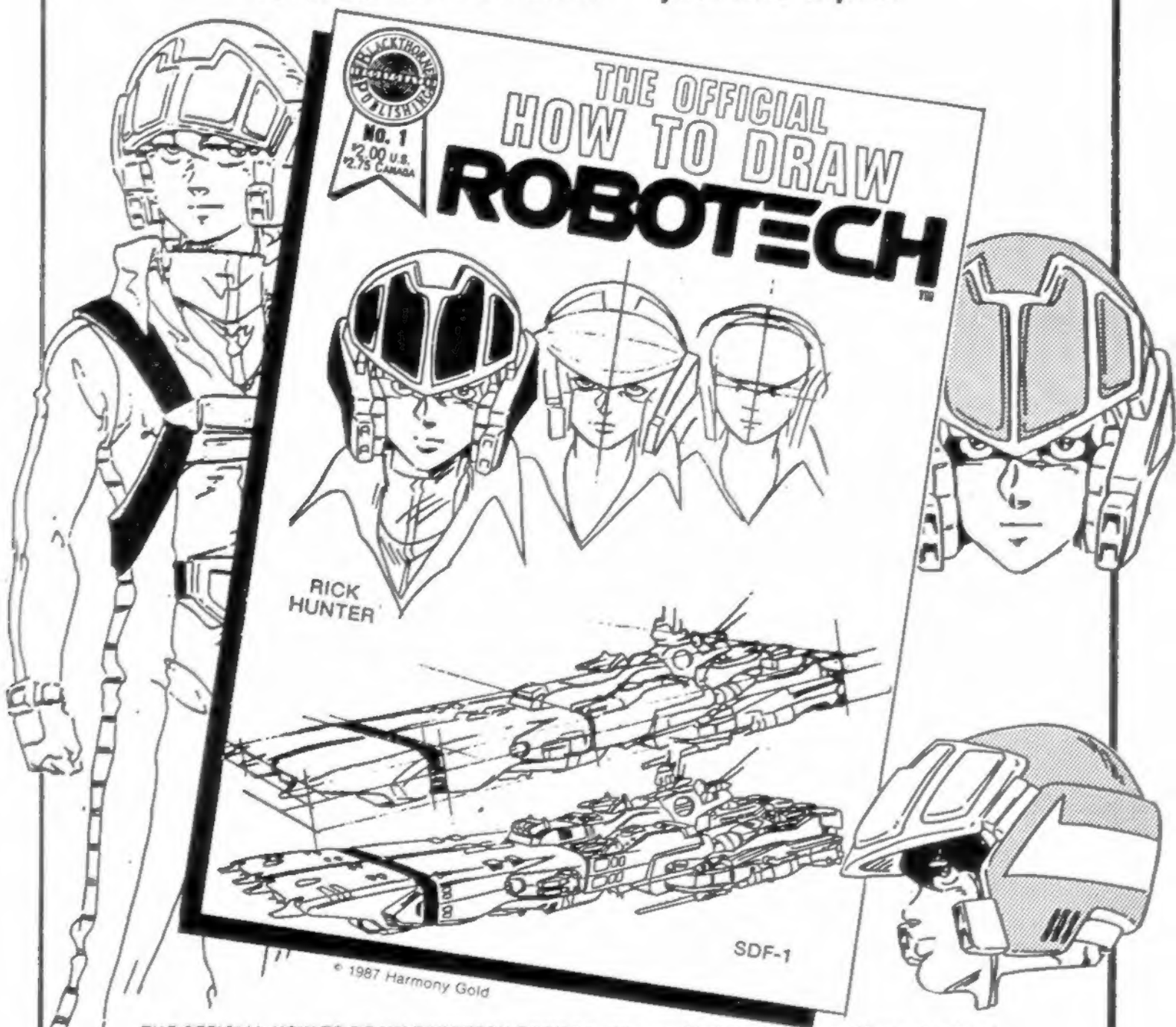

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